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BY BRET HARTE,

AUTHOR OF "THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP, "TALES OF THE ARGONAUTS," "IN THE CARQUINEY WOODS," "MARNJA," ETC.

CHAPTER IX.

"Wot everybody says," said the frightened Seth, gaining a cowardly confidence under his adversary's emotion. "Wet every cub that sets yer, under his cantin' teachin', and sees 'em together, knows. It's wot you'ld hev knowed of se and Roop Filgee hadn't played ye fer a softy all the time. And while you've bin hangin' round yer fer a flicker of Cressy's gownd as she prances out o' school, he's bin lyin' low and laffin' at ye, and while he's turned Roop over to keep you here, pretendin' to give ye lessons, he's bin gallivantin' round with her and huggin' and kissin' her in barns and in the brush-and now you want to quar'll with me."

He stopped, panting for breath, and stared malignantly in the grey face of his hearer. But Uncle Ben only lifted his heavy hand mildly with an awkward gesture of warning, stepped softly in his old cautious hesitating manner to the open door, closed it, and returned gently. "I reckon you got in through the winder, didn't ye, Seth?" he said, with a labored af-

fectation of unemotional ease, "a kind o' one leg over, and one, two, and then you're in, eh?" "Never you mind how I got in, Ben Daoney," returned Seth, his hostility and insolence in treasing with his apponent's evident weakness, "ez iong ez I got yer and got-by G-d! what I kem here fer! For whiles all this was goin' on and whiles the old fool man and old fool woman was swallowin' what they did see and blinkin'at what they didn't and buggin' themselves that they'd got high-toned kempany fer their darter, that high-toned kempany was playin' them too, by G-d! Yes, sir! that high-toned, cantin' school-teacher was keepin' a married woman in Frisco, all the time he was here honey-foglin' with Cressy, and I've got the papers yer to prove it." He tapped his breast-pocket with a course laugh and thrust his face forward into

he gray shadow of his adversary's. "An' you sorter spotted their bein' in this yer lesk and bursted it?" said Uncle Ben, gravely examining the broken lock in the darkness as it t were the most important feature of the inci-

Seth nodded. "You bet your life, I saw him hrough the winder only this afternoon lookin" over 'em alone, and I reckoned to lay my hands lid!" he added, with a triumphant chuckle.

"And you did-sure pop!" said Uncle Ben, with slow, deliberate admiration, passing his seavy band along the splintered lid. "And you seckon, Seth, that this yer showin' of him up will break off enythin' betwixt him and this yer -this yer Miss-Miss McKinstry!" he continued, with labored formality.

"I reckon of the old fool McKinstry don't thoot him in his tracks thar'll be white men mough in Injin Springs to ride this high-toned, pizenous hypocrit on a rail outer the settle-"That's so!" said Uncle Ben musingly, after a

thoughtful pause, in which he still seemed to be more occupied with the broken desk than his companion's remark. Then he went on cauliously, "And ez this thing orter be worked mighty fine, Seth, p'r'aps, on the hull, you'ld better let me have them papers." "What! You!" snarled Seth, drawing back with a glance of angry suspicion; "not if I

"Seth," said Uncle Ben, resting his elbows on the desk confidentially, and speaking with pain-ful and heavy deliberation, "when you first in-terdeosed this yer subject you elluded to my hevin', so to speak, rights o' pre emption and interference with this young lady, and that in your opinion I wasn't purtectin' them rights. It pears to me that, allowin' that to be gospel truth, them ther papers orter be in my pos-session—you hevin', so to speak, no rights to purtect, bein' off the board with this yer young lady, and bein' moved gin'rally by free and inde-pendent cussedness. And, ez I sed afore, this sort of thing hevin' to be worked mighty fine, and them papers manniperlated with judgment, I reckon, Seth, if you don't objeck, I'll hev—hev

to trouble you." Seth started to his feet with a rapid glance at the door, but Uncle Ben had risen again with the same alarming expression of completely fill-ing the darkened school-room, and of shaking the floor beneath him at the slightest movement. Already he fancied he saw Uncle Ben's powerful arm hovering above him ready to descend. It suddenly occurred to him that if he left the execution of his scheme of exposure and vengeance to Uncle Ben, the onus of stealing the letters would lall equally upon their possessor. This advantage scemed more probable than the dan-ger of Uncle Ben's weakly yielding them up to the master. In the latter case he [Seth] could still circulate the report of having seen the let-It of jealousy—a hypothesis the more readily accepted from the latter's familiar knowledge of the school-house and his presumed ambitious lealousy of Cressy in his present attitude as a man of position. With affected reluctance and

resitation be put his hand to his breast-pocket. "Of course," he said, "if you're kalkilstin' to take up the quar'll on your rights, and ez Cressy sin't anythin' more to me, you orter hev the proofs. Only don't trust them into that hound's hands. Once he gets 'em again he'll secure a warrant agin you for stealin'. That'll be his game. I'd show 'em to her first-don't ye see! -and I reckon ef she's old Ma'am McKinstry's

darter she'll make it lively for him." He handed the letters to the looming figure before him. It seemed to become again a yielding mortal, and said in a hesitating voice, "P'r'aps you'd better make tracks outer this, Seth, and leave me yer to put things to rights and fix up that door and the desk agin to-morrow mornin'. He'd better not know it to onct, and so start a row about bein' broken into." The proposition seemed to please Seth; he even extended his hand in the darkness. Bu he met only an irresponsive void. With a slight shrug of his shoulders and a grunting farewell he felt his way to the door and disappeared. For a few moments it seemed as if Uncle Ben had also deserted the school-house, so prefound and quiet was the hush that fell upon it. But as the eye became accustomed to the shadow a grayish bulk appeared to grow out of it over the master's desk and shaped itself into the broad figure of Uncle Ben. Later, when the moon rose and looked in at the window, it saw him as the master had seen him on the first day he had begun his lessons in the school-house, with his face bent forward over the desk and the same look of child-like perplexity and struggle that he had worn at his allotted task. Unheroic, ridiculous, and no doubt blundering and idiotic as then, but still vaguely persistent in his thought, he remained for some moments in this attitude. Then rising and taking advantage of the moonlight that flooded the desk he set himself to mend the broken lock with a large mechanical clasp-knife he produced from his pocket, and the aid of his workmanlike thumb and finger. Presently he began to whistle softly, at first a little artificially and with relapses of reflective silence. The lock of the desk restored, he secured into position again that part of the door lock which he had burst off in his entrance. This done, he closed the door gently and once more stepped out into the moonlit clearing. In replacing his knife in his pocket he took out the letters which he had not touched since they were handed to him in the darkness. His first glance at the handwriting caused him to stop. Then still staring at it, he began to move slowly and automatically back-wards to the porch. When he reached it he sat down, unfolded the letter, and without attempting to read it. turned its pages over and over with the unfamiliarity of an illiterate man in search of a signature. This when found apparently plunged him again into motionless abstraction. Only once he changed his position to pull up the legs of his trousers, open his knees, and extend the distance between his feet, and then, with the unfolded pages carefully laid in the moonlit space before him, regarded them with dubious speculation. At the end of ten minutes he rose, with

When he reached the botel he turned into the bar-room, and, observing that it happened to be comparatively deserted, asked for a glass of whisky. In response to the bar-keeper's glance of curiosity-as Uucle Ben seldom drank, and then only as a social function with others-he

a sigh of physical and mental relaxation, re-

folded the letter, put it in his pocket, and made

explained: "I reckon straight whisky is about ex good ex the next thing for blind chills." The bar-keeper here interposed that in his larger medical experience he had found the exhibition of ginger in combination with gin attended with effect, although it was evident that in his business capacity he regarded Uncle Ben .

"Ye ain't seen Mr. Ford hanging round yer lately!" continued Uncle Ben with laborious

as a drinker, with distrust.

The bar-keeper, with his eye still scornfully fixed on his customer, but his hands which were engaged in washing his glasses under the counter, giving him the air of humorously comriunicating with a hidden confederate, had not

seen the schoolmaster that afternoon. Uncle Ben turned away and slowly mounted the staircase to the master's room. After a moment's pause on the landing, which must have been painfully obvious to any one who heard his

## The Penitent's Prayer.





door which were equally ridiculous in contrast | On'y a man ez had the Fourth Reader at his | with his powerful tread. The door was opened promptly by the master. "Oh, it's you, is it?" he said shortly. "Come

Uncle Ben entered without noticing the somewhat ungracious form of invitation. "It war me," he said, "dropped in, not finding ye down stairs. Let's have a drink."

The master gazed at Uncle Ben who, owing to his abstraction, had not yet wiped his mouth of the liquor he had imperfectly swallowed, and was in consequence more redolent of whisky than a confirmed toper. He rang the bell for the desired refreshment with a slightly cynical smile. He was satisfied that his visitor, like many others of humble position, was succumbing to his good fortune.

"I wanted to see ye, Mr. Ford," he began, taking an unproffered chair and depositing his hat after some hesitation outside the door, "in regard to what I once: told ye about my wife in Mizzouri. P'r'aps you disremember!" "I remember," returned the master resigned-

"You know it was that arternoon that fool Stacey sent the sheriff and the Harrisons over to McKinstry's barn." "Go on!" petulantly said the master, who had his own reasons for not caring to recall it. "It was that arternoon, you know, that you handn't time to hark to me-hevin' to go off on an engagement," continued Uncle Ben with pro-tracted deliberation, "and——"

"Yes, yes, I remember," interrupted the master exasperatedly, "and really unless you get on faster, I'll have to leave you again." "It was that arternoon," said Uncle Ben without heeding him, "when I told you I hadn't any idea what had become o' my wife ez I left in

"Yes," said the master sharply, "and I told you it was your bounden duty to look for her." "That's so," said Uncle Ben, nodding comfortably, "them's your very words; on'y a leetle more strong than that, of I don't disremember. Well, I reckon I've got an idee." The master assumed a sudden expression of

interest, but Uncle Ben aid not vary his monot-"I kem across that idee, so to speak, on the trail. I kem across it in some letters es was lying wide open in the brush. I picked 'em up,

and I've got 'em here.' He slowly took the letters from his pocket with one hand while he dragged the chair on which he was sitting beside the master. But with a quick flash of indignation Mr. Ford rose and extended his hand.

, "stolen from my desk. Who has dared to do But Uncle Ben had, as if accidentally, inter-

"These are my letters, Dabney," he said stern-

posed his elbow between the master and Seth's "Then it's all right?" he returned deliberately. "I brought 'em here because I thought they might give an idee where my wife was. For them letters is her own handwrite. You remember ez I told you ez how she was a scollard." The master sat back in his chair white and dumb. Incredible, extraordinary and utterly unlooked as was this revelation, he felt instinct-

ively that it was true. "I couldn't read it myself-ez you know. I didn't keer to ax any one else to read it for me -you kin reckon why, too. And that's why I'm troublin' you to-night, Mr. Ford-ez a friend." The master with a desperate effort recovered his voice. "It is impossible. The lady who wrote those letters does not bear your name. More than that," he added with hasty irrele vance, "she is so free that she is about to be married, as you might have read. You have made a mistake; the handwriting may be like,

but it cannot really be your wife's." Uncle Ben shock his head slowly. her'n-there's no mistake. When a man, Mr. Ford, hez studied that bandwrite-hevin, so to speak, knowed it on'y from the outside-from seein' it passin' like between friends-that man's chances o' bein' mistook ain't ez great ez the man who on'y takes in the sense of the words that might b'long to everybody. And her name not bein' the same ez mine don't foller. Ef she got a divorce she'd take her old gal's name—the name of her fammerly. And that would seem to allow she did get a divorce. What mowt she her called herself when she writ this?"

The master saw his opportunity, and rose to it with a chivalrous indignation that, for the moment, imposed even upon himself. "I decline to answer that question," he said, angrily. "I refuse to allow the name of any woman who honors me with her confidence to be dragged into the infamous outrage that has been committed upon me and common decency. And I shall hold the thief and scoundrel, whoever he may be, answerable to myself in the absence of her natural protector.

Uncle Ben surveyed the hero of these glittering generalities with undisguised admiration. He extended his hand to him gravely. "Shake! Ef another proof was wantin', Mr. Ford, of that bein' my wife's letter," he said, "that high-toned style of yours would settle it. For ef thar was one thing she did like it was that sort of po'try. And one reason why her and | And although you may call this me didn't get on, and why I skedaddled, was be- | a selfish view of our relations, i believe that you

finger's ends could talk like that. Bein' brought up on Dobell-ez is nowhere-it sorter lets me out of you, ez it did outer her. But allowin'it | in what he foud! believed was the bitterness of ain't the square thing for you to mention her name, that wouldn't be nothin' agin' my doin' it, and callin'her well-Lou Price, in a keerless sort o' way, eh?"

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"I decline to answer further," replied the master quickly, although his color had changed at the name. "I decline to say another word on the matter until this mystery is cleared up—un-til I know who dared to break into my desk and and steal my property, and the purpose of this unheard-of outrage. And I demand possession of those letters at once."

Uncle Ber without a word put them in the master's hand, to his slight surprise, and it must be added to his faint discomfiture, nor was it decreased when Uncle Ben added with grave naivete and a patronizing pressure of his hand on his shoulder—"In course, ez your taken' it on to yourself, and ez Lou Price aint got no further call on me, they orter be yours. Ez to who got 'em outer the desk, I reckon you ain't got no suspicion of any one spyin' round ye-

In an instant the recollection of Seth Davis's face at the window, and the corroboration of Rupert's warning, flashed across Ford's mind. The hypothesis that Seth had imagined that they were Cressy's letters, and had thrown them down without reading them when he found out his mistake, seemed natural. For if he had read them, he would, undoubtedly, have kept them to show to Cressy. The complex emotions that had disturbed the master on the discovery of letters were resolving themselves into a furious rage at Seth. But before he dared revenge imself, he must be first assured that Seth was ignorant of their contents. He turned to Uncle

"I have a suspicion, but to make it certain I must ask you for the present to say nothing of this to any one." Uncle Ben nodded. "And when you hev found out and you're settled in your mind that you can make my mind easy about this yer Lou Price, ez we'll call her, bein' divorced squarely, and bein', so to speak, in the way o' getting married agin, ye might let me know-ez a friend. I reckon I won't trouble you any more to-nightonless you and me takes another sociable drink together in the bar. No? Well, then, goodnight." He moved slowly toward the door. With his hand on the lock he added: "Ef yer writin' to her agin, you might say ez how you found me lookin' well and comfable, and hopin' she's enjyin' the same blessin'. 'So long." He disappeared, leaving the master in a hope-

less collapse of conflicting, and it is to be feared, not very heroic emotions. The situation which had begun so dramatically had become suddenly unromantically ludicrous, without, however, losing any of its embarrassing quality. He was conscious that he occupied the singular position of being more ridiculous than the husbandwhose invincible and complacent simplicity stung him like the most exquisite irony. For an instant he was almost goaded into the fury of declaring that he had broken off from the writer of the letters forever, but its inconsistency with the chivalrons attitude he had just taken occurred to him in time to prevent him from becoming doubly absurd. His rage with Seth Davis seemed to him the only feeling left that was genuine and rational, and had a spurious ring. It was necessary for him to lash himself into a fury over the hypothesis that the letters might have been Cressy's, and desecrated by that scoundrel's touch. Perhaps he had read them and left them to be picked up by others. He looked over them carefully to see if their meaning would to the ordinary

reader appear obvious and compromising. His eyes fell on the first paragraph: "I should not be quite fair with you, Jack, if affected to disbelieve in your faith, in your love for me and its endurance, but I should be still more unfair if I didn't tell you what I honestly believe, that at your age you are apt to deceive yourself, and, without knowing it, to deceive others. You confess you have not yet decided upon your career, and you are always looking forward so hopefully, dear Jack, for a change in the future, but you are willing to believe that for more serious things than that will suffer no change in the meantime. If we continued as we were, I who am older than you and have more experience might learn the misery of seeing you change towards me as I have changed towards another, and for the same reason. If I were sure I could keep pace with you in your dreams and your ambition, if I were sure that I always knew what they were, we might still be happy -but I am not sure, and I dare not again risk my happiness on an uncertainty. In coming to my present resolution I do not look for happiness, but at least I know I shall not suffer disappointment, nor involve others in it. I confess I am growing too old not to feel the value to a woman-a necessity to her in this countryof security in her present and future position. Another can give me that

now-feel the justice of it, and thank me for With a smile of scorn he tore up the letter,

an outraged trustful nature, forgetting that for many weeks he had scarcely thought of its writer, and that he himself in his conduct had already anticipated its truths. CHAPTER XIII.

The master awoke the next morning, albeit after a restless night, with that clarity of conscience and preception which it is to be feared is more often the consequence of youth and a perfect circulation than of any moral conviction or integrity. He argued with himself that as the only party really aggrieved in the incident of the previous night, the right of remedy remained with him solely, and under the benign influence of an early breakfast and the fresh morning air he was inclined to feel less sternly even towards Seth Davis. In any event, he must first carefully weigh the evidence against him, and examine the scene of the outrage closely. For this purpose, he had started for the school-bouse fully an hour before bis usual time. He was even light-hearted enough to recognize the humorous aspect of Uncle Ben's appeal to him, and his own ludicrously paradoxical attitude, and as he at last passed from the dreary flat into the fringe of upland pines, he was smiling. Well for him, perhaps, that he was no more affected by any premonition of the day before him than the lately awakened birds that lightly cut sleeping woods around him in their long flashing saber curves of flight. A yellow-throat, destined to become the breakfast of a lazy hawk still swinging above the river, was especially moved to such a causeless and idiotic roulade of mirth that the master, listening to the foolish bird, was fain to whistle, too. He presently stopped, however, with a slight embarrassment. For a few paces before him Cressy had unexpectedly appeared.

She had evidently been watching for him; but not with her usual indolent confidence. There was a strained look of the muscles of her mouth, as of some past repression, and a shaded hollow under her temples beneath the blonde rings of her shorter hair Her habitually slow, steady eye was troubled, and she cast a furtive glauce around her before she searched him with her glance. Without knowing why, yet vaguely fearing that he did, he became still more embarrassed, and in the very egotism of awkwardness stammered without further salutation: "A disgraceful thing has happened last night, and I'm up early to find the perpetrator.

My desk was broken into, and-"I know it," she interrupted, with a half impatient, half uneasy putting away of the subject with her little hand-"there-don't go all over it again. Paw and maw have been at me | small India-rubber tobacco pouch lying beabout it all night-ever since those Harrisons in their anxiousness to make up their quarrel, rushed over with the news. I'm tired of it." For an instant he was staggered. How much had she learned! With the same awkward indirectness, he said vaguely:

"But it might have been your letters, you "But it wasn't," she said simply. "It ought to have been. I wish it had-" She stopped, yet now that Uncle Ben had gone even that | and again regarded him with a strange expres sion. "Well," she said slowly, "what are you "To find out the scoundrel who has done

this," he said firmly, "and punish him as he The almost impercertible shrug that had raised her shoulders gave way as she regarded him with a look of wearied compassion. "No," she said gravely. "you cannot. They're too many for you. You must go away, at

"Never," he said, indignantly. "Even if it

were not a cowardice. It would be more-a

confession!"

"Not more than they already know," she said, wearily. "But, I tell you, you must go. have sneaked out of the house and run here all the way to warn you. If you-you care for me, Jack-you will go." "I should be a traitor to you if I did," he said, quickly. "I shall stay." "But"if-if-Jack-if-" she drew nearer him

with a new-found timidity, and then suddenly

placed her two hands upon his shoulders: "Ifif-Jack-I were to go with you!" The old rapt, eager look of possession had come back to her face now; her lips were softly parted. Yet even then she seemed to be waiting some reply more potent than that syllabled on the lips of the man before her. Howbeit that was the only response. "Darling," he said," kissing her, "but wouldn't that

justify them -"Stop," she said suddenly. Then putting her hand over his mouth she continued with the same half weary expression: "Don't let us go over all that again either. It is so tiresome. Listen, dear. You'll do one or two little things for me-won't you, dandy boy? Don't linger

morrow, Saturday, is your holiday, you know, and you'll have more time. Keep to yourself to-day as much as you can, dear, for twelve hours-until-until-you hear from me, you know. It will be all right then," she added, lifting her eyelids with a sudden odd resemblance to her father's look of drowsy pain, which Ford had never noticed before. "Promise me that, dear, won't you?"

With a mental reservation he promised hurriedly-preoccupied in his wonder why she seemed to avoid his explanation, in his desire to know what had happened, in the pride that kept him from asking more or volunteering a defense, and in his still haunting sense of having been wronged. Yet he could not help saying as he caught and held her hand: "You have not doubted me, Cressy? You have

not allowed this infamous raking up of things that are past and gone to alter your feelings?" She looked at him abstractedly. "You think it might alter anybody's feelings, then?"

"Nobody's who really loved another ---," he "Don't let us talk of it any more," she said, suddenly stretching out her arms, lifting them above her head with a wearied gesture, and then letting them fall clasped before her in her old habitual fashion. "It makes my head ache; what with paw and maw and the rest of them-I'm sick of it all."

She turned away as Ford drew back coldly and let her hand fall from his arm. She took a few steps forward, stopped, ran back to him again, crushed his face and head in a close embrace, and then seemed to dip,like a bird into the tall bracken, and was gone. The master stood for some moments cha-

grined and bewildered; it was characteristic of his temperament that he had paid less heed to what she told him than what he imagined had passed between her mother and herself. She was naturally jealous of the letters-he could forgive her for that; she had doubtless been twitted about them, but he could easily explain them to her parents-as be would have done to ber. But he was not such a fool as to elope with her at such a moment, without first clearing his character-and knowing more of hers. And it was equally characteristic of him that in his sense of injury he confounded her with the writer of the letters-as sympathizing with his correspondent in her estimate of his character. and was quite carried away with the belief that

he was equally wronged by both. It was not until he reached the school-house that the evidences of last night's outrage for a time distracted his mind from his singular interview. He was struck with the workmanlike manner in which the locks had been restored and the care that had evidently been taken to remove the more obvious and brutal traces of burglary. This somewhat staggered his theory that Seth Davis was the perpetrator; mechanical skill and thoughtfulness were not among the lout's characteristics. But he was still more disconcerted on pushing back his chair to find a neath it. The master instantly recognized it; he had seen it a hundred times before-it was Uncle Ben's. It was not there when he had closed the room yesterday afternoon. Either Uncle Ben had been there last night or had anticipated him this morning. But in the latter case he would scarcely have overlocked his fallen property-that, in the darkness of the night, might have resdily escaped detection. His brow darkened with a sudden conviction that it was Uncle Ben who was the real and only offender, and that his simplicity of the pravious night was part of his deception. A sickening sense that he had been again duped-but why or to what purpose he hardly dared to think-overcame him. Who among these strange people could he ever again trust? After the fashion of more elevated individuals, he had accepted the respect and kindness of those he believed his inferiors as a natural tribute to his own superiority; any change in their feelings must therefore be hypocrisy or disloyalty; it never occurred to him that he might have fallen below their stand-

The arrival of the children and the resumption of his duties for a time diverted him. But although the morning's exercise restored the master's self-confidence, it cannot be said to have improved his judgment. Disdaining to question Rupert Filgee, as the possible confidant of Uncle Ben, he answered the curious inquiries of the children as to the broken doorlock with the remark that it was a matter that he should have to bring before the trustees of the board, and by the time that school was over and the pupils dismissed he had quite resolved upon this formal disposition of it. In spite of Cressy's warning-rather because of it -in the new attitude he had taken towards her and her friends, he lingered in the school-house until late. He had occupied himself in drawing up a statement of the facts, with an intimation that his continuance in the school would depend upon a rigid investigation of the circumstances, when he was aroused by the clatter of horses' hoofs. The next moment the school-house was surrounded by a dozen men.

He looked up; half of them dismounted and entered the room. The other half remained long at the school-house after lessons. Go right | outside darkening the windows with their mo-

fore him on the saddle; each man wore a rude mask of black cloth partly covering his face. Although the master was instinctively aware that he was threatened by serious danger, he was far from being impressed by the arms and disguise of his mysterious intruders. On the contrary, the obvious and glaring inconsistency of this cheaply theatrical invasion of the peaceful school-house; of this opposition of menacing figures to the scattered children primers and text-books that still lay on the desks around him, only extracted from him a half scornful smile as he coolly regarded them. The fearlessness of ignorance is often as unassailable as the most experienced valor, and the awe-inspiring invaders were at first embarrassed and then humanly angry. A lank figure to the right made a forward movement of impotent rage, but was

checked by the evident leader of the party. "Ef he likes to take it that way, there ain't no regulators' law agin it, I reckon," he said, in a voice which the master instantly recognized as Jim Harrison's, "though ez a gin'ral thing they don't usually find it fun." Then turning to the master be added, "Mister Ford, ef that's the name you go by everywhere, we're wantin' a

man about your size." Ford knew that he was in hopeless peril. He knew that he was physically defenseless and at the mercy of twelve armed and lawless men. But he retained a preternatural clearness of perception, and audacity born of unqualified scorn for his antagonists, with a feminine sharpness of tongue. In a voice which astonished even himself by its contemptuous distinctness, he said: "My name is Ford, but as I only suppose your name is Harrison perhaps you'll be fair enough to take that rag from your face and show it to me like a man. The man removed the mask from his face with a slight laugh.

"Thank you," said Ford. "Now, perhaps you will tell me which one of you gentlemen broke into the school-house, forced the lock of my deak and stole my papers. If he is here I wish to tell him he is not only a thief, but a cur and a coward, for the letters are a woman's-whom he neither knows nor has the right to know." If he had hoped to force a personal quarrel and trust his life to the chance of a single antagonist; he was disappointed, for although his un expected attitude had produced some effect among the group, and even attracted the attention of the men at the windows, Harrison strode

deliberately toward him. "That kin wait," he said: "jest now we propose to take you and your letters and drop 'em and you outer this yer township of Injin Springs. You kin take 'em back to the woman or critter you got 'em of. But we kalkilate you're a little too handy and free in them sorter things to teach school round yer, and we kinder allow we don't keer to hev our gals and boys eddicated up to your high-toned standard. So of you choose to kem along easy we'll mak' you comf'ble on a hoss we've got waitin' outside, an' escort you across the line. Ef you don't-we'll take you anyway."

The master cast a rapid clance around him. In his quickness of perception he had already noted that the led horse among the cavalcade was fastened by a lariat to one of the riders so that escape by flight was impossible, and that he had not a single weapon to defend himself with or even provoke, in his desperation, the struggle that could forestall ignominy by death, Nothing was left him but his voice, clear and trenchant as he faced them.

"You are twelve to one," he said calmly, "but if there is a simple man among you who dare step forward and accuse me of what you only together dare do, I will tell him he is a liar and a coward, and stand here ready to make it good against him. You come here as judge and jury, condemning me without trial, and confronting me with no accusers; you come here as lawiess avengers of your honor, and you dare not give me the privilege of as lawlessly defending my

There was another slight murmur among the men, but the leader moved impatiently forward. "We've had enough o' your preachin'; we want you," he said, roughly. "Come."

Stop," said a duli voice. It came from a mute figure which had remaited motionless among the others. Every eye was turned upon it as it rose and lazily pushed the cloth from its face. "Hiram Mckinstry!" said the others in min

gled tones of astonishment and suspicion. "That's me!" said McKinstry coming forward with heavy deliberation. "I joined this yer delegation at the cross-roads instead o' my brother who had the call. I reckon et's all the same-or mebbe better. For I perposo to take this yer gentleman off your hands."

He lifted his slumbrous eyes for the first time to the master, and at the same time put himself between him and Harrison. "I perpose," he continued "to take him at his word. I perpose ter give him a chance to answer with a gun. And ez I reckon, by all accounts, there's no man yer ez hez a better right than me. I perpose to be the man to put that question to him in the same way. Et may not suit some gents, he continued slowly, facing an angry exclamation from the lank figure benind him, "ez would prefer to her eleven men to take up their private

who is the most injured her the right to the first say and that man's me." With a careful deliberation that had a double significance to the malcontents, he handed he own rifle to the master, and without looking a him continued: "I reckon, sir, you've seen the afore, but ef it sin't quite to your hand, any of these gents, I kalkilate, will be high-toned enul

to give you the chyce o' theirs. And there's no need o' trapsin' beyon' the township lines to fix this yer affair; I propose to do it in ten minutes in the brush youder. Whatever might have been the feelings and intentions of the men around him, the precedence of McKinstry's right to the duello was a deny; if any resistance to it had been contemtemplated by some of them, the fact that the master was now armed, and that Mr. McKipstry would quickly do battle at his side a revolver in defence of his

checked any expression. They silently drew back as the master and McKinstry slowly passed out of the school-house together, and then followed in their rear. In that interval the master turned to McKinstry and said in a low voice: "I accept your challenge, and thank you for it. You have never done me a greater kindness-whatever I have done to you -yet I want you to believe that neither now nor then-I meant you any harm."

"Ef you mean by that, sir, that ye reckon ye von't return my fire, ye're blind and wrong. For it will do you no good with them," he said, with a significant wave of his crippled hand toward the following crowd, "nor me neither." Firmly resolved, however, that he would not fire at McKinstry, and clinging blindly to this which he believed was the last idea of his foolish life, he continued on without another word until they reached the open strip of chemisel that flanked the clearing.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

RUSSIA'S GREAT SECRET.

How Marshall Jewell Stole Their Method of In one of the stores on Broadway lately I noticed some fine Russia leather goods of vari-

ous kinds, and was tempted through curiosity to take a closer look at them. "Why is it," I asked the proprietor, "that these goods cannot be manufactured in this country as well as in Russiaf"

"Bless your heart," he said, "these goods are made right here, in this country, and neither Russia nor any other place can make them any better. You see, for a long while Russia en oved a monopoly at this sort of work until Connecticut Yankee happened on the scene and caught on, so to speak, to the secret of its "This leather was manufactured in a large

factory situated in one of the towns of north ern Russia. The owners possessed some secre about curing the leather which they jealousl guarded. England and other countries se peratives to this factory to learn the secret but when a man once entered the factory it was a life job with him. He had to stay there. "Other men were sent there disguised, but I carefully was the place watched that nothing could be learned, and finally all attempt at die

covering the secret were abandoned and the Russians were allowed to continue their 'monopoly' undisturbed, although many imitations of it were manufactured. "About this time the late Marshall Jewell was minister to Russia from this country. M Jewell and been brought up in the leather business and was then the owner of seve

tanneries in Connecticut. Of course he had heard of this now famous factory, and, more from curiosity than from any desire to learn th secret of the business, he expressed a wish aspect the works. "The Russian authorities never suspen that Mr. Jewell was interested in the leather business himself, and in his official capacity the factory owners, who were aided by the govern-

ment in maintaining their secret, felt rather complimented that Mr. Jewell should have expressed such a desire, and accordingly Mr. Jewell, as it were, was given the 'freedom of "For three days the United States minister remained in the Russian town and visited the factory many times. He was quick to 'catch on."

and he did 'catch on' so much so that on his return to the United States he determined to put the knowledge he had thus acquired to a practical test. "The result was that Mr. Jawell was soon manufacturing 'Russian leather' on his own account. His first experiment was a perfect suc-

cess, and now, as a consequence, this sort of leather, as you will perceive, is manufactured in this country equal in every respect to the best that Russia can turn out."

A Mystery of the Administration.

The unprecedented growth of opium